MARJORIE LIU

SANA TAKEDA

image

31

MONSTRESS™

Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline

THE STORY SO FAR...

War has engulfed the Known World, and Maika Halfwolf is at the epicenter. The Federation of Man, led by Maika's former teacher Colonel Anuwat, is determined to retaliate against the Arcanics for a massive explosion in the Cumaean Holy City of Aurum – an explosion secretly orchestrated by Maika's estranged father, the Lord-Doctor. In the first major battle, the humans charged the walls of the Arcanic city of Ravenna while Cumaean witches sneaked inside to wreak havoc within. With the help of Maika and her allies, the Arcanics have so far held off the invaders, but the casualties have been severe.

Meanwhile, Maika's closest friend, Tuya, the secret Baroness of the Arcanic Dusk Court, has attempted to leverage her political marriage to Maika's aunt, the Warlord of the Arcanic Dawn Court, to enact her own battle strategies – but they have been scuttled and sabotaged at every turn. The official war may be one of humans versus Arcanics, but internal power struggles on each side – unpowered humans versus Cumaea, Navy versus Army, Dawn Court versus Dusk, and many more – will decide the course of history. And all the while, Monstra are gathering power just beyond the wall between realms, threatening to destroy the world entire.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh.

ZINN A mysterious, primordial Monstrum of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

SIR CORVIN D'ORO An Arcanic Lord, First Watchman of the Court and Commander of the Inner Wall. He is loyal to the Dusk Court but has willingly defied their orders because of his desire to protect Maika and his belief that she can and will serve a greater purpose.

WARLORD The Dawn Court's "Sword of the East," twin sister of Moriko Halfwolf, and Maika's aunt. Ruthless in her ambition, the Warlord's greatest desire is to unravel the mystery behind the destruction of Constantine. She believes the secrets of Constantine will protect the Arcanics in their impending war against the humans — but she does not realize that the answers she seeks lie within her young niece.

TUYA: Maika's closest friend in the world, who has been with her since before the Battle of Constantine. Unbeknownst to Maika, she is also the Baroness of the Last Dusk, a high-level member of the Arcanic Dusk Court tasked with containing — or even destroying — Maika's power.

Tuya...

...There are days I would give anything to see you again...

...And there are days I hope that I never do.

You might hate me now, for what I have embraced.

You might hate me for choosing to live instead of die.

THE SAME KILLER IS TARGETING OUR PATROLS AND RAIDING PARTIES, COLONEL ANUWAT.

KILLERS, YOU MEAN.

NO. THE SURVIVORS INSIST IT'S ONLY A YOUNG WOMAN AND SOME...DEMONIC APPARITION.

Which would be fitting, because I hate myself for that choice, too.

And yet, I can't help it, Tuya.

SHE FITS THE DESCRIPTION OF THE... *UM*, HUMAN... YOU WERE INTERROGATING.

WELL.

WE ALL KNOW A *HUMAN* DIDN'T DO THIS.

Part of me still has hope.

ISN'T THAT RIGHT, OFFICER?

Y-YES, COLONEL.

DAUGHTER... HOW GOOD IT IS TO SEE YOU EATING. I FIND MYSELF...DELIGHTED... THAT YOU HAVE BEGUN TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR HUNGER.

MINDFULNESS *IS* BETTER, IS IT NOT? BETTER THAN FEARING WHO YOU MIGHT HARM SHOULD YOUR HUNGER RAGE OUT OF CONTROL?

NO, IT'S *NOT* BETTER. KILLING OTHERS TO SURVIVE IS A FUCKING NIGHTMARE.

BUT DAUGHTER... NOW YOU ACCEPT IT AS PART OF YOUR NATURE...AND *THAT* IS A START.

A START TO WHAT, OLD MAN?

WHERE DOES THE HUNGER END? DOES IT JUST BECOME SOMETHING ELSE THAT'S EVEN MORE AWFUL?

DAUGHTER... IT IS NOT THE HUNGER THAT TRANSFORMS.

HUNGER IS THE FUEL. BUT IT IS YOU...YOU... WHO BECOMES SOMETHING ELSE.

WHETHER YOU BECOME ABERRANT OR GLORIOUS... THAT IS UP TO YOU.

MY MOTHER GAVE ME SIMILAR ADVICE. IT WAS SHITTY THEN, AND IT'S SHITTY NOW.

WHY ARE YOU IN MY DREAMS, OLD MAN?

I KNOW THIS IS REAL. SOMEHOW YOU WIGGLED YOUR WAY INTO MY HEAD.

YES, EASILY. A GOD SLIPPED FROM MY BLOOD TO YOURS. THERE IS NO CLOSER BOND.

I AM HERE TO REMIND US *BOTH* OF THAT CONNECTION. OF ITS VITAL IMPORTANCE...TO OUR FUTURES.

WE NEED EACH OTHER, DAUGHTER. THOUGH I AM, PERHAPS, MORE COMFORTABLE WITH THAT IDEA THAN YOU ARE.

UH-HUH. SO WHAT'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN?

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE NOW?

OLD MAN?

REALLY? FUCK YOU.

=SIGH= WHAT DID YOU MAKE OF THAT?

...HE WANTED... YOU TO KNOW...YOU ARE NOT SAFE... IN YOUR OWN MIND...THAT YOU ARE HIS...ANY TIME HE WISHES...

...HE HAD NO INFORMATION...TO GIVE...EXCEPT THAT...

CLEARLY. BUT THAT WASN'T ALL OF IT.

...CHILD... THE FIRST CHANCE...

...KILL HIM... DO NOT HESITATE...

...HE UNDID ME...REACHED INTO ME...AND I AM STILL... WOUNDED...

ZINN...

...ABOUT WHAT I SAW INSIDE YOUR MEMORIES. THE CHILD, AND THE HUMAN, MARIUM --

...NO...

STOP. IT MATTERS, ZINN. I NEED TO KNOW WHY THE ANCIENTS WERE TRYING TO KILL THE CHILD.

...FOR THE SAME REASON...THEY WILL TRY TO KILL...YOU...

...FOR YOUR POWER...FOR WHAT...YOU CAN...UNDO...

ZINN! FUCK!

ER, MISS?

I'M SO GLAD YOU FINALLY WOKE UP. LORD CORVIN SENT ME TO FIND YOU.

THE WARLORD'S AIR FLEET IS COMING.

IT'LL BE HERE BY EVENING.

PONTUS.

"WELL, IS IT ANY SURPRISE THAT WE RAN OUT OF TIME? IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER RAVENNA STANDS OR FALLS, THE DAMAGE IS DONE. THE FEDERATION AND THE ARCANIC COURTS ARE NOW AT WAR."

BUT, GIVEN THE INFORMATION YOU'VE JUST SHARED, ADMIRAL BRITO, PERHAPS WE CAN HOPE FOR A QUICK RESOLUTION.

CAN WE? IT IS A SHOCKING REQUEST.

I MYSELF AM SURPRISED AT THE AUDACITY OF THE DUSK COURT'S DEMAND.

EXTERMINATE ALL THE CUMAEA?

IT'S BRILLIANT.

THE CUMAEA HAVE THE FEDERATION UNDER THEIR THUMBS. THEY'RE THE REASON THIS WAR IS HAPPENING.

REMOVE THEM FROM POWER AND ORDER IS RESTORED.

YOU DON'T SIMPLY STAMP OUT A RELIGION.

NOR DO YOU MURDER THOUSANDS SIMPLY BECAUSE OF THAT RELIGION.

WE MAY NOT AGREE WITH THE PATH THE CUMAEA HAVE LED US DOWN, BUT ALMOST ALL OF US HAVE FAMILY WHO ARE PART OF THEIR ORDER.

THE ADMIRAL IS RIGHT. THIS IS AN IMPOSSIBLE REQUEST.

AND LET US SAY YOU AGREE. LET US IMAGINE YOU CARRY THROUGH AND MURDER THEM ALL.

THE FEDERATION WOULD TURN ON ITSELF OVER THAT CHOICE -- HUMANS AGAINST HUMANS.

OR THEY WOULD BLAME US.

IF I MIGHT INTERRUPT A MOMENT -- I HAVE ANOTHER PROPOSITION, FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION.

AS YOU KNOW, THE WAVE COURT HAS BEEN GRANTED PERMISSION FROM THE WAVE EMPRESS HERSELF TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS SECOND CONFLICT.

JUST PRIOR TO THIS MEETING, I WAS INFORMED THAT THE WAVE COURT HAS MADE AT LEAST *ONE* DECISION.

OUR ANCIENTS WILL GRANT THE FEDERATION NAVY PROTECTION FROM THE SEA. BUT ONLY IF IT ABSTAINS FROM THE WAR, OR ALLIES ITSELF WITH THE ARCANIC COURTS.

SHOULD YOU FIGHT FOR THE FEDERATION...

...YOU WILL SUFFER ABSOLUTE DESTRUCTION.

HOLY CITY OF AURUM.
CAPITAL OF THE FEDERATION.

WE'RE CURSED!

IT'S A LIE THEY CAN'T SEE US! LOOK! THEIR EYES ARE WATCHING!

CITIZENS! DO NOT BE AFRAID! MARIUM IS WITH YOU! THESE ARE ILLUSIONS CAST BY THE DEMONS --

SHUT UP! THIS IS YOUR FAULT!

FWAK

WE CAN'T LISTEN TO THE CUMAEA!

IT'S THE WAR! WE'RE BEING PUNISHED FOR KILLING ARCANICS!

=SIGH= REALLY? MUST OUR SISTER-BROTHERS BE SO OBVIOUS?

I SUPPOSE THE PRISON WALLS ARE THINNING IF THEY CAN SENSE THE MASK.

SUCH POWERS OF OBSERVATION YOU POSSESS.

YOU, FINISH YOUR REPORT. HOW GOES OUR LILIUM HARVESTS?

AS A-ALWAYS, THE S-SCIENTISTS ARE DOING THEIR B-BEST TO MAXIMIZE LILIUM LOADS, BUT WE NEED MORE B-BODIES.

F-FORTUNATELY, COLONEL ANUWAT'S R-RAIDS AROUND RAVENNA HAVE BEEN P-PROVIDING US WITH NEW STOCK.

SPEAKING OF ANUWAT...WE SENT HER OUR BLESSED LITTLE ONES.

HOW HAVE THEIR PHYSICAL ENHANCEMENTS HELD UP UNDER THE REALITIES OF BATTLE?

NOT WELL. ONLY TWO SURVIVED, WITH INJURIES -- THE S-SISTERS ODILE AND ZORTIA.

WE DON'T KNOW HOW THE OTHERS D-DIED, AS THEIR HANDLER PERISHED IN RAVENNA...

...AND THE INQUISITRIXES HAMMER AND NEEDLE HAVE GONE SILENT.

WHAT AN *EXPENSIVE* DISAPPOINTMENT.

SEND ORDERS FOR SISTERS ODILE AND ZORTIA TO BE EXTERMINATED SO WE CAN RECYCLE THE LILIUM IN THEIR BODIES.

I DON'T WANT TO WASTE A PRECIOUS RESOURCE ON ANYTHING DEFECTIVE.

YES, HOLY MOTHER!

HAMMER AND NEEDLE ARE AN UNACCEPTABLE LOOSE END, GULL.

THEY SAW YOUR TRUE FORM. YOU SHOULD HAVE KILLED THEM.

I WAS RATHER PREOCCUPIED WITH BEING POSSESSED, AND THEN EXPERIMENTED ON.

YES...*THAT.* YOU *HAVE* VASTLY CHANGED SINCE WE LAST SAW EACH OTHER.

WHERE IS YOUR FIGHT? YOUR WIT? YOUR FOCUS?

YOU SOUND... ALMOST MORTAL.

AMUSED, ARE YOU? DON'T BE.

SOMETHING IS WRONG. OLD DAGON AND DREAMER REFUSE TO SEE IT.

I WAS NOT DECEIVED. A DEFILED OVERPOWERED MY WILL THROUGH THE MASK, AND COMPELLED ME TO ACT FOR IT.

YOU CANNOT IMAGINE THE FILTH THAT STILL COATS ME.

YOU FORGET MY HISTORY WITH THE DEFILED. I MOST CERTAINLY *CAN* IMAGINE, GULL. I REMEMBER WHAT THEY DID TO ME WITH PERFECT, *EXCRUCIATING* CLARITY.

AND I AM SORRY.

...THANK YOU.

I FEAR FOR US IF THE FALLEN HOUSES HAVE LOST CONTROL. WE CAN'T OPEN THE PRISON UNTIL WE KNOW FOR CERTAIN.

I WON'T ALLOW IT.

YOU... WON'T ALLOW IT?

DON'T SAY THOSE WORDS, EVEN IN JEST.

DREAMER HEARS ALL.

AND THE DREAMER SAYS THE SONG *IS* PURE.

I MUST, AS SUCH, BELIEVE IT WAS *JUST* AN UNFORTUNATE COINCIDENCE THAT A DEFILED REACHED THROUGH THE MASK.

YOUR WISDOM IS APPRECIATED.

YOU'RE RIGHT. I WAS MISTAKEN. I WON'T BRING IT UP AGAIN.

EXCELLENT.

WELCOME, OH DIVINE OVERSEERS OF MARIUM'S WILL! WELCOME TO THE INNER SANCTUM OF THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS' LAB! WE ARE BLESSED AND HUMBLED THAT YOU WOULD GRACE US WITH YOUR --

OH, BE SILENT. HAVE YOU LEARNED YET WHAT IS POWERING THE SHIELD SURROUNDING THAT BOX?

ALAS, NO -- AND OUR ATTEMPTS TO PENETRATE IT HAVE BEEN MET WITH...MAXIMUM RESISTANCE.

NEVER FEAR, HOWEVER! SCIENCE SHALL PREVAIL, MOST HOLY OF HOLY MOTHERS.

WE SHOULD ASK MAIKA'S FATHER. I HAVE NO DOUBT HE KNOWS HOW TO LOWER THIS SHIELD.

ANOTHER EXPERT? I WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO CONFER --

BE QUIET, GULL.

I WANT MORE GUARDS DOWN HERE.

"IN FACT, I WANT THE ENTIRE GARRISON DEFENDING THIS ROOM.

"BUILD A FORTRESS AROUND IT, IF YOU HAVE TO."

WELCOME TO AURUM, LORD WOLFE.

WHAT BRINGS YOU TO OUR FAIR CITY?

OH, I'M LOOKING FOR A VERY SPECIAL GIFT...

...FOR MY *DAUGHTER.*

HER FEVER ISN'T GOING DOWN?

NO. IF WE WERE HOME IN THE NORTH, I'D CARRY BETTANI INTO THE MOUNTAINS AND PACK HER IN SNOW.

OR USE WILLOW-WORT. THERE SHOULD BE SOME GROWING OUTSIDE THE CITY --

ABSOLUTELY NOT.

DON'T YOU FUCKING DARE.

THE WARLORD PLANS ON USING HER AIRSHIPS TO DESTROY THE FEDERATION ARMY.

SHE'LL WASTE FIREPOWER AND FUEL. THE HUMANS ARE TOO HIDDEN. SHE'LL HAVE TO BOMB THE ENTIRE FOREST FROM HERE TO THE WALL.

BETTER TO EVACUATE, LACE THE CITY WITH MINES AND TRIPWIRES, AND LEAVE BEHIND AN ASSASSINS UNIT TO KEEP PICKING THEM OFF.

I'LL SUGGEST IT. BUT THE WARLORD HAS CLASSICAL VALUES WHEN IT COMES TO WAR.

YOU MEAN, SHE BELIEVES IN ***RULES...***

...AND HER ***PRIDE*** IS LINKED TO THOSE RULES.

UNFORTUNATLY, YOU'RE NO LONGER IN A POSITION TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT.

WITH THE WARLORD HERE, YOU DO NOT HAVE POWER IN RAVENNA. THE KIND OF POWER YOU NEED, WHICH IS POLITICAL AND SUBTLE.

HOW DOES SOMEONE GET THAT POWER?

ALLIES. CONNECTIONS. EXCHANGES OF FAVORS.

OH, YOU *HAVE* ALLIES! MISTER SEIZI...CORVIN, ME, MASTER REN, MISS VIHN? EVEN THE LEADERS IN PONTUS, FOR HOW YOU SAVED THE CITY.

SHE NEEDS MORE THAN THAT, KIPPA.

WELL...WHAT'S WRONG WITH JUST *TALKING* TO THE WARLORD? AND MAKING HER AN ALLY?

YOU'VE NEVER EVEN MET, HAVE YOU?

YOU THINK SHE WANTS TO HURT MISS, BUT MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE SHE DOESN'T KNOW HER.

IT'S MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT, KIPPA.

HUH.

KIPPA, I NEED TO BORROW THE NECKLACE I GAVE YOU.

OH, OF COURSE... IT'S YOURS, MISS.

NO. I'LL GIVE IT BACK.

LADY HALFWOLF --

FOCUS ON YOUR SISTER, CROW.

Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline

WELL, MOTHER.

I SUPPOSE IT'S TIME.

...WHAT... ARE YOU DOING...?

NOT RUNNING. TAKING A CHANCE.

MY OLD WAYS AREN'T GOING TO WORK ANYMORE, ZINN. THERE'S TOO MUCH AT STAKE.

...CHILD...

...I CANNOT DENY...YOU HAVE SHOWN... GROWTH...

...BUT I... FEAR...YOUR INSTINCTS...

TO QUOTE THE POETS: *FEAR IS MERELY THE SOUL TRYING TO HOLD ON TO MORTAL LIFE.*

...AND WHAT...IS WRONG... WITH THAT...?

WE'RE NOT GOING TO SURVIVE IF WE DON'T RISK OUR LIVES, ZINN.

...THAT... IS THE LOGIC...OF IDIOTS...

WELL, WE'LL SEE WHAT THIS IDIOT CAN DO, WON'T WE?

KIPPA AND I ARE LEAVING, CROW.

YOU WERE RIGHT. THIS IS NO PLACE FOR US.

WHERE WILL YOU GO?

PONTUS. I NEED SEIZI'S NETWORK IF I'M GOING TO FIND THE REST OF THIS MASK.

I'LL MISS YOU. YOU'VE BEEN SUCH A GOOD FRIEND.

PLEASE STAY ALIVE. YOU AND YOUR SISTER.

OH.

MAY THE GODDESS PROTECT YOU, KIPPA.

YOU'RE CERTAIN OF THIS?

IT'S TIME. I CAN'T AVOID IT ANY LONGER.

THANK YOU FOR NOT LEAVING ME BEHIND, MISS.

I'M SURPRISED YOU SAID YES. THERE ARE STILL FOXES HERE.

I CAN'T BE AROUND THEM RIGHT NOW. NOT AFTER WHAT I DID...HOW I BROKE MY WORD.

BESIDES... I KNOW I CAN LEARN THINGS FROM YOU.

THAT'S A TERRIBLE IDEA.

Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline

THE BARONESS WILL KILL YOU FOR LETTING HER GO.

SHE SHOULD HAVE GIVEN *ME* THE POISON.

TANNO, TELL THE BARONESS THAT THE HALFWOLF HAS LEFT RAVENNA FOR GOOD.

I THINK YOU'LL FIND THAT THIS IS THE ONE TIME SHE'LL BE PLEASED BY YOUR BAD NEWS.

WE'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH, CORVIN.

YOU SHOULD HAVE LEFT RAVENNA WITH THE HALFWOLF.

YOU'RE CERTAIN?

...ZZT...I SAW IT MYSELF...ZZT...THE HALFWOLF IS GONE...ZZT...

...ZZT... SHOULD I FOLLOW... ZZT...

BARONESS, THE WARLORD HAS COMMANDED YOUR PRESENCE IN RAVENNA...

I'M AFRAID I CAN'T AFFORD TO DISOBEY HER.

STAY, TANNO. I MIGHT NEED YOU.

HELLO, WIFE.

WOOOOSH

TELL THE OTHER COMMANDERS THAT IF THEY EVER AGAIN OBEY MY WIFE -- *WITHOUT DIRECT ORDERS FROM ME* -- I'LL DO WORSE THAN THIS TO THEM.

YOU ARE SO WASTEFUL.

BOMB THE FOREST.

BURN THE HUMANS OUT.

IF YOU THINK THEY'RE STILL THERE, WAITING TO BE BOMBARDED --

CONFER WITH THE LOCALS AND ORGANIZE A SCOUTING PARTY. CONFIRM THE LOCATION OF THE HUMAN ARMY -- AND THEN STRIKE.

Y-YES, WARLORD.

YOU COMMITTED TREASON. I SHOULD KILL YOU.

WORSE, YOU FAILED.

I LEARNED SOMETHING IMPORTANT.

AND I LEARNED I CAN'T TRUST YOU.

YOU ALREADY KNEW THAT. AND YET, I'M NOT THE ONE WITH MY HEAD CUT IN HALF.

Read more FREE comics on ReadComicOnline

SABOTAGE? YOU'RE SURE?

OF COURSE. WE ONLY FINISHED REPAIRS A DAY AGO. MY OWN PEOPLE ARE GUARDING THE CANNONS NOW.

THEN THE FEDERATION HAS INFILTRATED OUR RANKS.

THAT WOULD BE PREFERABLE.

BUT THE SABOTEURS KILLED THEMSELVES WITH POISON. IT TURNED THEIR GUMS WHITE, MADE THEIR BREATH SMELL LIKE... VANILLA.

ONLY ONE ROOT DOES THAT...AND IT GROWS IN THE MOUNTAINS NORTH OF THE DUSK COURT.

NO, ENOUGH WITH YOUR CONSPIRACIES.

THE ANCIENTS WOULD NOT SABATOGE MY WEAPONS TO PROTECT A LILIUM REFINERY. THAT IS INSANITY.

WHY ARE YOU SO BLIND?

BECAUSE I FIGHT REAL WARS, NOT PRETEND WARS.

AND YOU'VE ALMOST COST ME THIS WAR, WHEN WE'VE BARELY BEGUN.

ONE COULD ALMOST IMAGINE ***YOU'RE*** THE ONE WORKING FOR THE HUMANS.

YOU ARE SO TREACHEROUS.

YOU WEAR SO MANY MASKS, TELL SO MANY LIES AND HALF-TRUTHS. DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHO YOU ARE?

OR WHAT YOU REALLY WANT?

IT'S NOT ME, I KNOW THAT.

Hope is a strange feeling, Tuya.

Hope is frightening.

What is hope, except the possibility of disappointment?

And yet...I've learned that hope is just another kind of hunger.

Hope is another kind of fuel.

To hope...is to ask for a possibility, just a chance, at something better.

GASP

The smallest, most fragile hope will keep a person fighting, no matter how impossible the odds. I know this now.

And I hope, Tuya.

Oh, I hope.

I hope that if I stay alive long enough...I can become someone new.

That I can do some kind of good that will outweigh the bad.

That one day, I can be worthy of your love.

Of any kind of love.

Isn't that odd?

I never used to hope. That was your job. You had enough hope for the both of us.

You had hope for me.

Until you didn't.

I might not have remembered your eyes...but I remember that.

TO BE CONTINUED...

An excerpt from a lecture by the esteemed **Professor Tam Tam,** former First Record-Keeper of the Is'hami Temple, and learned contemporary of Namron Black Claw...

IT IS A LITTLE-KNOWN TRUTH THAT CATS ONCE WALKED FREELY BETWEEN WORLDS.

PERHAPS WE STILL DO, AND THOSE LUCKY ENOUGH TO CROSS OVER SIMPLY DO NOT SPEAK OF THEIR ADVENTURES. SUCH SECRECY WOULD NO DOUBT BE WISE. WE NO LONGER LIVE IN THE AGE OF ADARA FARCLAW, WHERE WORLDWALKING WAS AN EXPERIENCE OF JOY AND LEARNING, INSTEAD OF SOMETHING TO FEAR.

IT IS SAID THAT ADARA FARCLAW KEPT DETAILED ACCOUNTS OF HER ADVENTURES, BUT MOST OF THOSE HAVE BEEN LOST. WHAT HAS SURVIVED ARE FRAGMENTS OF HER PHILOSOPHIES, WHICH UNDERPINNED THE FOUNDATION OF THE EMPIRE SHE LATER ESTABLISHED.

THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE PHILOSOPHIES, IN HER WORDS?

"KINDNESS IS A POWER."

ACROSS EVERY WORLD, IN EVERY REALM SHE VISITED, ADARA FARCLAW OBSERVED HOW THE SMALLEST ACT OF KINDNESS, EVEN AGAINST MONUMENTAL CRUELTY, COULD CREATE A RIPPLE OF UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCES THAT IN TIME MIGHT DEVASTATE THE MOST FEARSOME OF DOMINIONS.

"UBASTI TAKES GREAT JOY IN UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES," ADARA WROTE, *"AND THERE IS NO MORE DIVINE REVERBERATION THAN THE ONE THAT COMES FROM GENTLE ACTS... TO OTHERS, AND TO ONE'S OWN SELF."*

THE POETS, WITHOUT ATTRIBUTION TO THE FARCLAW PHILOSOPHIES, HAVE LONG SAID THAT KINDNESS WRAPS TAIL WITH COMPASSION, THAT COMPASSION WRAPS TAIL WITH LOVE, AND THAT THIS TRINITY OF GRACE IS A REDOUBT AGAINST WHICH NO FORCE OF FEAR OR DARKNESS CAN PREVAIL.

ADARA FARCLAW PUT IT ANOTHER WAY:

"THE GENTLE HEART AND ITS ACTS ARE THE KEYS TO ENLIGHTENMENT, AND WILL OPEN DOORS TO WORLDS YOU HAVE NEVER IMAGINED."

HOLD THAT LESSON CLOSE, KITS.

AND ASK YOURSELVES THIS: WHEN ADARA FARCLAW SPOKE OF KEYS AND DOORS, WAS SHE SPEAKING ONLY OF PHILOSOPHIES...

...OR WAS SHE TEACHING US HOW TO TAKE OUR OWN FIRST STEPS UPON THE ROAD BETWEEN WORLDS?

SANA'S SKETCHES

A

Dear Readers -

Everyone enjoys changing their hairstyle from time to time — Maika is no different! Here you can see a few of the new looks Sana played with. Who knows? We might use them all at some point.

- *Marjorie*

B

Send letters & fan art to:
monstress.comic@gmail.com!
#monstress on Twitter and Instagram!

C

D

NEXT ISSUE

#monstress

MONSTRESS™ ISSUE 31

WRITTEN BY MARJORIE LIU
ILLUSTRATED BY SANA TAKEDA
LETTERING & DESIGN BY RUS WOOTON
EDITED BY JENNIFER M SMITH
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: CERI RILEY

image®

IMAGE COMICS, INC. • **Todd McFarlane**: President • **Jim Valentino**: Vice President • **Marc Silvestri**: Chief Executive Officer • **Erik Larsen**: Chief Financial Officer • **Robert Kirkman**: Chief Operating Officer • **Eric Stephenson**: Publisher / Chief Creative Officer • **Shanna Matuszak**: Editorial Coordinator • **Marla Eizik**: Talent Liaison • **Nicole Lapalme**: Controller • **Leanna Caunter**: Accounting Analyst • **Sue Korpela**: Accounting & HR Manager • **Jeff Boison**: Director of Sales & Publishing Planning • **Dirk Wood**: Director of International Sales & Licensing • **Alex Cox**: Director of Direct Market & Specialty Sales • **Chloe Ramos-Peterson**: Book Market & Library Sales Manager • **Emilio Bautista**: Digital Sales Coordinator • **Kat Salazar**: Director of PR & Marketing • **Drew Fitzgerald**: Marketing Content Associate • **Heather Doornink**: Production Director • **Drew Gill**: Art Director • **Hilary DiLoreto**: Print Manager • **Tricia Ramos**: Traffic Manager • **Erika Schnatz**: Senior Production Artist • **Ryan Brewer**: Production Artist • **Deanna Phelps**: Production Artist
I M A G E C O M I C S . C O M

MONSTRESS™ CREATED BY MARJORIE LIU & SANA TAKEDA

MONSTRESS™ #31. January 2021. **Published by Image Comics, Inc.** Office of publication: PO BOX 14457, Portland, OR 97293. Copyright © 2021 Marjorie Liu & Sana Takeda. All rights reserved. "Monstress," its logos, and the likenesses of all characters herein are trademarks of Marjorie Liu & Sana Takeda, unless otherwise noted. "Image" and the Image Comics logos are registered trademarks of Image Comics, Inc. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means (except for short excerpts for journalistic or review purposes), without the express written permission of Marjorie Liu & Sana Takeda, or Image Comics, Inc. All names, characters, events, and locales in this publication are entirely fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), events, or places, without satirical intent, is coincidental. Digital edition. For international rights, contact: foreignlicensing@imagecomics.com.

MONSTRESS™

IMAGECOMICS.COM

RATED M / MATURE • **EPIC FANTASY**